

Philippians in Ten

Week Six: Joy and Peace

Readings:

Phil 4: 4-9, Phil 1:4; 1:18; 1:25, Phil 2:2; 2:17, 18, 19; 2:29, Phil 4:10

Recap

This talk looks at what Paul has to say about joy, peace and freedom from anxiety. Paul continues to remap the Philippians' universe. He is showing them a whole different way of thinking that puts Christ at the centre and so changes everything in their world, all the values and dehumanizing ways of life of the Roman Empire.

Joy is a major theme in the letter. Remarkable because:

- The world of Paul and the Philippians was one of deep pessimism and widespread human suffering.
- Paul was in prison in probably vile conditions.

But Paul's encouragement to "rejoice in the Lord always" is rooted in his understanding of the change in the universe because of the coming, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus the Messiah. Israel's prophets had pointed to this as a time of great joy.

The joy that comes because of this reordering of the universe:

- Means that death is no longer has the last word
- Life here and now can be marked by joy and peace.

The final challenge is:

- Either: we can settle for the anxiety, strife, cynicism and pessimism of the world around
- Or: we can see with the eyes of faith this new world that Paul has remapped for us – based on the reality of the risen and reigning Lord Jesus. A new world where love and service overcome hate and self-centredness; where acquisitiveness and anxiety give way to peace; and where joy is gloriously possible, no matter what life throws at us.

Questions to Consider:

What are the things that are a cause of joy for Paul and the Philippians?

Paul's 1st century world was one of deep pessimism. Note some ways in which our world is similar and ways in which it is different.

The Roman Empire's propaganda said that all was well because of Rome's rule. What gives false hope and false cause for joy in our world?

What does Paul point to as the real source of joy?

Paul says that we are awaiting a Saviour from heaven who will transform our bodies (in resurrection). Is that just "pie in the sky when we die"? How important is this ultimate aspect of Christian hope in our world where people live longer and more healthily?

Paul roots our joy in the fact that "the Lord is near." Are there times you have experienced the strength and deep joy that God brings in the dark times? (Psalm 23:4; Ps. 145:18f)

Is there a way in which us being "kind" (4:5) is related to being able to rejoice?

Paul's example of rejoicing while in prison and his "rejoice always" advice to a group of people under severe pressure is almost hard to believe. Is it really possible to follow his advice? How is rejoicing in all circumstances possible?

Paul says that prayer – with thanksgiving – is a key to living without anxiety. In what ways could you build more thanksgiving in to your life?

Phil 4: 8 Paul points to the importance of the things we deliberately think about as important to living in joy and without anxiety. Are there unhelpful influences we subject ourselves and our thinking to? And how can we follow Paul's advice.